

Communicating the Literacy Message

Communicating the literacy message to families and community connected to your school is critical to achieving the greatest success possible. In creating school-wide literacy focus, it will be imperative to include families and other community individuals to encourage and support students.

Strong communications are important to the success of any initiative. Engaging your staff, students, families, and area community members will provide the greatest assurance of success with your school literacy plan.

The communications information provided on these pages will assist schools in proven techniques to communicate with families and the community, whether business or individuals.

The Partnership for Kentucky Schools generously contributed the content of their Dialogue Guide and Communications Kit for use here. The content has been adapted to assist schools in communication techniques for developing involvement by families and community in a school literacy plan.

Communications Kit

Contact:
Stephanie Lucas Christenson
Program Consultant
Community and Family Engagement Branch
Kentucky Department of Education
859-564-3678

Communications Kit

[NOTE: *This communications kit has been adapted from the Partnership for Kentucky Schools' Dialogue Guide and Communications Kit. The Partnership website is at www.pfks.org.*]

Personal contacts are critical, but other strategies, including contact with the news media, can be helpful in getting the word out to the broader community. And it's important to remember that once is not enough when it comes to communicating successfully. Your message must be repeated as often and in as many places as possible.

The following information is designed to assist your school literacy plan communication efforts. You can use the checklist as a starting point for your communications plan, adding or deleting specific elements as warranted by your particular situation. In addition, suggestions for working with the news media and a sample media advisory and news release can be found on the following pages.

Communications Checklist

Suggestions for working with the news media

About News Releases /Media Advisory

- **Sample News Releases**
- **Sample Media Advisory**

COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

- Prepare and distribute notices for bulletin boards at your school, businesses, and community gathering places. (2-3 weeks)*
- Provide information to local cable-television community bulletin board service, if available. (3-4 weeks)*
- Ask area businesses to post notices on their web sites and to distribute information to employees via email. (2-3 weeks)*
- Post notices on your school web site. (1-2 weeks)*
- Prepare and distribute an advisory to the news media. (2 weeks)*
- Prepare and distribute a news release to the media. (1 week)*

**Indicates how far in advance the information should be distributed. Please note that local newspaper deadlines may require a different schedule of notification.*

Suggestions for Working with the News Media

The best approach to working with the news media involves personal contact.

- The first step is to check with the newsroom at each newspaper, radio, and television station in your community to obtain the name of the right person for you to contact.
- Familiarize yourself with media deadlines. Reporters for morning newspapers generally must have their stories written by late afternoon or early evening. Deadlines for afternoon newspapers generally are early in the morning. Deadlines for weekly newspapers vary. Radio reporters often file hourly reports. Television news crews have to allow time for production as well as newsgathering.
- Return media phone calls promptly. Try to do it within an hour if possible, but definitely avoid putting them off until the end of the day. Remember those deadlines.
- In addition to working with the media who provide regular news coverage, there are a few other communications options to keep in mind. Check with the media outlet indicated below to find out more about:
 - Letters to the editor or opinion articles for your local newspaper
 - Public affairs programs on television or radio
 - Local cable access channels that provide time for community programming
 - Public service announcements on television or radio

News Releases/ Media Advisory

A **media advisory** is a brief announcement of an event. A **news release** provides additional details, either before or after an event is held. A release is one of the easiest ways to distribute information, but it's also one of the easiest things for reporters to toss in the trash.

Here's how to avoid the garbage can:*

Typed, double-spaced releases are best.

Don't worry about flowery prose or catchy leads. Get to the news immediately. Make sure you include the basics: who, what, when, where and why. You would be surprised how many people forget the address or time of an event.

Be brief. You shouldn't leave out important details just to fit your release on one page. But don't expect someone to read a six-page document, either. As a general rule, the limit is two pages.

List a contact person and phone numbers. It's best to include home phone numbers since reporters often need information after regular office hours.

Accuracy is imperative. If you misspell a name or give a wrong title, there's a good chance you will see the mistake repeated. Double check dates, times, names and titles.

Include directions. Include accurate, detailed directions. A map is a great idea.

Know who should get your release. Use a media guide to update your mailing list. If you're unsure who should receive your release, it never hurts to call.

Get personal. It's often a good idea to follow up news releases with a phone call to make sure your information got to the right person. Use the call to offer additional information – not to plead for coverage.

**From, in part: Kentucky Media Guide. Society of Professional Journalists, Bluegrass Chapter, and Clark Publishing, Inc.)*

Sample News Release

Engaging (*name of school*) students and their families in the design of a school-wide literacy is the objective of a community conversation scheduled for (*date*).

Sponsored by (*name of school*), the discussion will include families, teachers, students, and community members.

The focus will include discussion about how families and the community can be engaged with students in increasing literacy.

Additionally, the gathering will focus the conversation at the school level in an effort to improve communication between families, students, teachers, and the community.

The community discussion will be held at (*time, day, date and location*). It is open to the public. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

###

For more information contact:

Name of Contact

Day Telephone Number:

Night Telephone Number:

Email:

Sample Media Advisory

The (*name of school*) will host a community conversation on (*day and date*) to discuss issues affecting the literacy plan for (*name of school*). The session is open to the public. Participants will include families and their students, teachers, local businesses, and other community members.

Time: X p.m., Date, Month, Day, Year

Place: Name and Address of Location

Contact: Name, Day Phone and Night Phone

Directions to Location: